



# SAUDI ARABIA EFFORTS TO COMBAT EXTREMISM

September 2020

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## Leading in the Middle East

Under the guidance of Crown Prince Mohammad bin Salman the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has launched new efforts to combat extremist ideology and shut down hate speech. Saudi Arabia is supporting and leading in the fight against extremism and terrorism across the globe.

"Thanks to Saudi support under the reign of King Salman bin Abdulaziz and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, we are currently conducting 38 anti-terrorism projects around the world, in addition to human rights services, such as supporting victims of terrorism, combating atomic and biological weapons, and providing cybersecurity,"

- Under-Secretary for the UN Counter-Terrorism Office Vladimir Voronkov

## Counterterrorism Cooperation

- Saudi Arabia has worked in concert with the United States to counter extremism and terrorism, through Republican and Democratic administration. This relationship has kept citizens of both countries safe.
  - Last summer, Saudi special forces captured the leader of the Yemeni branch of ISIS, Abu Osama al-Muhajer, and other leading members of the terror organization.
  - Saudi Arabia has carried out hundreds of airstrikes against ISIS targets – more than any Arab country – and provided more than \$100 million to U.S.-backed efforts in Syria.
  - Saudi Arabia has helped disrupt numerous international terror operations. For example, in 2010, Saudi Arabia informed the U.S. that al-Qaeda had smuggled bombs into printer cartridges on UPS and FedEx planes already in flight, disrupting the plot.

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- Today our troops are training together in Saudi Arabia to combat common foes and deter Iranian aggression. KSA and the U.S. are positive force for regional and global security.
- Frances Townsend, former Homeland Security Advisor for President Bush, asserted in 2016 that "I can tell you even to this day there are plots directly targeting the U.S. homeland that would not have been disrupted without the assistance of Saudi Arabia."

## Combating Terrorist Financing

Saudi Arabia has implemented robust policies across its banking and financial sectors that aim to stem the flow of any money into the pockets of terrorists and extremist organizations.

- The Saudi Arabian Monetary Agency (SAMA) requires all financial institutions within the Kingdom's jurisdiction to implement all of the recommendations for combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism issued by the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). Saudi Arabia earned observer status in the FATF in 2015. According to FATF, Saudi Arabia has "demonstrated both an ability and willingness to pursue terrorist financing," resulting in over 1,700 investigations and convictions since 2013.
- Saudi Arabia established money-laundering units in SAMA and all local banks to ensure the banking system is not exploited by money-laundering operations and to report any dubious transactions to competent authorities.
- Saudi Arabia established a money intelligence department to monitor and investigate any suspicious financial transactions. Investigations are typically done in coordination with the SAMA and the Saudi banks.
  - As of June 2016, this has led to prosecutions of more than 240 suspects for terrorism-financing activities and convictions of more than 225 individuals. Authorities have frozen and investigated more than 115 suspicious bank accounts and closed all unlicensed charity collection locations.
- In May 2017, Saudi Arabia and the United States partnered for the establishment of the Terrorist Financing Targeting Center (TFTC), strengthening cooperation on countering terror financing. The TFTC's goals are to identify, track and share information on terrorist financial networks;

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coordinate joint disruptive actions; and to offer capacity-building support to countries in the region that need assistance in countering terrorist threats.

- Saudi Arabia has placed sanctions on entities that assist in terror financing, including joint designations with the U.S. against the Al-Haramain Foundation, Al-Furqan, and others.

## Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition:

An intergovernmental counterterrorism alliance between Muslim countries formed December 2015 to collaborate on counter-extremism operations.

- Consists of 41 member states from across the Muslim world
- Presents a unified front against terrorist organizations and their attempts to destabilize countries and distort the image of Islam
- Uses strategic communications campaigns to refute radical and extremist narratives and propaganda in coalition countries
- Reaffirm the moderate values of Islam and principles of peace, tolerance, and compassion
- Combats terrorism financing in collaboration with international authorities

U.S. Secretary of Defense Ash Carter praised the launch, saying: "We look forward to learning more about what Saudi Arabia has in mind in terms of this coalition. But in general it appears it is very much in line with something we've been urging for quite some time, which is greater involvement in the campaign to combat ISIL by Sunni Arab countries."

## Center for Combating Extremist Ideology (Etidal):

Established in May 2017 the Etidal was created to expose, refute, and combat extremist ideology using innovative technical solutions.

- Monitors and analyzes extremist content as it is published online
- They can identify extremist content within six seconds of its publication
- Experts combine big data analytics with geopolitical, social, and historical knowledge to provide in-depth analysis and actionable insights on different extremist organizations
- Provides a counter-narrative that promotes moderation and acceptance of others
- Disrupts and sabotages the digital activities of extremist groups and

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“I’m really impressed by the way you have been working since the establishment of this important center to combat extremist ideology.”

- UN High-Representative for the Alliance of Civilizations Miguel Moratinos

“They’re doing counter-messaging. I think, if done in the right way, that center could use global influence, because they have a lot of money in that center to do the right thing. And I think that he has a moment in time to do the right thing. And the time is now.”

- Farah Pandith, Senior Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations

## The Ideological Warfare Center:

Launched in May 2017 by the Saudi Ministry of Defense

- Brings together experts from Saudi Arabia and around the world to provide diverse perspective on how to combat terrorism online
- Focused on exposing mistakes, allegations, suspicions, and deceptive techniques promoted by extremists and terrorists
- Runs programs to steer youths away from extremist thought
- Raises awareness of Islam in both Muslim and non-Muslim countries to build support for real Islam
- Also implements plans to promote moderation, tolerance, and dialogue

## The UN Counter Terrorism Centre:

Established in September 2011 to promote international counter-terrorism cooperation.

- Supports Member States in the implementation of the Global Counter-Terrorism Strategy
- Formed through a voluntary contribution of the Government of Saudi Arabia.
- Saudi Arabia donated a further \$100 million in August 2014, other donors included the U.S, the U.K, and Germany
- Led by a 22 member Advisory Board chaired by Excellency Ambassador Abdallah Yahya A. Al-Mouallimi, Permanent Representative of Saudi Arabia to the UN

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- Under-Secretary for the United Nations Counter-Terrorism Office Vladimir Voronkov serves as Executive Director

"What I see here today is the start of a new era in counterterrorism cooperation. States recognize that they cannot go it alone."

- Former UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon

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